



APPENDIX B

FWP Fishing Contest Guidelines

Authority for FWP to regulate fishing contests is found in [§87-3-121, MCA](#) and [ARM 12.7.801-809](#). With advancements in technology and social media there is increased interest in fishing contests that do not fall under the traditional contest format. Traditional contests are held on one body of water with centralized weigh or check stations and occur over a period of one or two days. There is an increased interest in contests such as catch, photo, and release and on-line contests that may involve multiple species of fish, multiple bodies of water and may occur over an extended period. These guidelines were developed to provide guidance for evaluation of contests that fall outside of the traditional tournament format while maintaining consistency with traditional fishing contests. Focus of these guidelines are based on evaluating potential biological impacts from a fishing contest; other recreational considerations, such as crowding and impacts to access sites, will be considered separately with the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division.

Fishing Contest Guidelines

Application and evaluation of all fishing contests follow [ARM 12.7.802](#) and [803](#). The following guidelines will also be considered as part of fishing contest evaluation:

- 1) No contests allowed on holiday weekends.
 - a) Holiday weekends include but not limited to: Easter, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Father's Day, 4th of July, Labor Day, Columbus Day, and Veterans Day.
 - b) Contests already scheduled for holiday weekends when this plan is adopted may be grandfathered in for that holiday.
- 2) Contest boundaries must be clearly defined in the application. Proposed boundary size should be minimized to reduce contest related fish mortality caused by holding fish for extended periods and/or traveling long distances.
 - a) Catch, photo, and release contests at a minimum must define the geographic area and waterbodies where the contest is to occur.
- 3) Prohibited areas for fishing contests include areas with dam closures and use restrictions as listed in the Montana Fishing Regulations. Waterbodies may include additional prohibited areas not listed in the Fishing Regulations.
- 4) Contests may be restricted or prohibited during specific times of the year due to high water temperatures, air temperatures, or critical habitat needs.

- 5) Contest sponsors are responsible for safe handling procedures and to ensure fish are released back to the source water. Stipulations for tournaments with large geographic boundaries may be required to separate fish taken from different locations and return them to specified locations as part of the permit requirements. This may require sponsors to have tanks large enough to hold fish (1/2 pound of fish per gallon of water is a general recommendation for holding and transporting fish), have oxygenation systems, and the ability to haul fish.
 - a) Transport of live fish is only allowed in the Eastern Fishing District.
- 6) No stringers are allowed for catch-and-release contests.
- 7) Participants cannot possess more than one daily bag limit at one time. If a fish is released alive it is not considered part of the daily bag limit.
 - a) Participants in catch, photo, and release contests will be required to adhere to daily bag and possession limits as defined in the Montana Fishing Regulations.
- 8) If bag limits, size limits or length restrictions are waived for a contest, all fish must be released alive back into the source water, even if that fish is a state record.
- 9) No setlines, trot lines, or hoop nets allowed.
- 10) Livewells and other fish holding containers (such as coolers) are required to have aeration running when fish are held and water exchanged at minimum on an hourly basis.
- 11) For catch-and-release contests, sponsors are encouraged to penalize anglers or teams with dead fish.
- 12) Proof of landowner permission is required at private boat ramps or on private property for weigh-ins.
- 13) Additional criteria will be used to evaluate the impacts of catch, photo, release contests, which may occur over multiple waterbodies and/or an extended period.
 - a) Contest organizers must list all species of fish included in the contest.
 - i) Endangered and threatened species are not allowed as part of a contest.
 - ii) State Rank 1, 2, 3, and potential species of concern may be allowed on some waterbodies and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by FWP Regions. Updated list of Species of Concern and State Rank can be found at <http://mtnhp.org/SpeciesOfConcern/>.
 - iii) Wild trout in streams and rivers may be allowed at the discretion of FWP Regions.
 - b) Contest application must include all potential FWP Fishing Access Sites and State Parks that may be used for the contest.
 - i) Fees for use of FWP sites may be waived on a case-by-case basis.
 - c) No waivers of fishing regulations will be allowed for catch, photo, and release contests. This includes daily bag limits, possession limits, length restrictions, and emergency restrictions or closures of waterbodies.

- d) Some waterbodies may not allow catch, photo, and release contests concurrently with traditional contests. See waterbody management strategies outlined in the Statewide Fisheries Management Plan on in [waterbody specific management plans](#).
- e) Some waterbodies may not allow catch, photo, and release contests on holiday weekends due to impacts to recreational activities. See waterbody management strategies outlined in the Statewide Fisheries Management Plan or in [waterbody specific management plans](#).

Region Specific Guidelines:

- 1) Prohibited areas for fishing contests for wild trout in FWP Region 5 include:
 - a) Bighorn River from the confluence of the Little Bighorn River to Afterbay Dam;
 - i) Contests below Two Leggings FAS for species other than salmonids are allowed.
 - b) Yellowstone River above Huntley Diversion Dam;
 - i) Exceptions will be considered for smallmouth bass contests above Huntley Diversion Dam.
- 2) Contests are prohibited in August on rivers in FWP Regions 5 and 7 due to high water temperatures.
- 3) Walleye contests on Fort Peck Reservoir (FWP Region 6) will have additional restrictions when water temperatures exceed 68 degrees Fahrenheit.
 - a) Organizers are required to have at least 1 weigh boat per 10 teams;
 - b) Weigh boat locations must be clearly identified in the contest application.